

**STATEMENT OF
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NATIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION
AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
FY 2011 BUDGET PRIORITIES**

MAY 12, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion thanks you for this opportunity to present its views on Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 funding issues under your jurisdiction.

**DEPARTMENT OF LABOR VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
(DOL-VETS)**

The Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) offers employment and training services to eligible veterans through a non-competitive Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program.

VETS administers the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) state grant programs; Transition Assistance Program; veterans' preference and Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA); Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP); Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP); and the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI). VETS' mission is to promote the economic security of America's veterans by assisting them in finding meaningful employment.

VETS should remain a national program with federal oversight and accountability. The American Legion is eager to see this program grow; and especially would like to see greater expansion of entrepreneurial-based, self-employment opportunity training. The mission of VETS is to promote the economic security of America's veterans.

The American Legion believes staffing levels for DVOPs and LVERs should match the needs of the veteran's community in each state and should not be based solely on the fiscal needs of the state government. Such services will continue to be crucial as today's active duty service members, especially those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, transition into the civilian work world. Adequate funding will allow the programs to increase staffing to provide comprehensive case management job assistance to disabled and other eligible veterans.

MAKE TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)/DISABLED TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (DTAP) MANDATORY

The American Legion is deeply concerned with the timely manner in which veterans, especially returning wartime veterans, transition into the civilian sector.

DOD estimates that 79 percent of separating active-duty service members attend the full TAP seminars but only 35 percent of Reserve Components service members attend. The American Legion believes these attendance numbers are a disservice to all transitioning service members, especially Reserve Component service members.

The American Legion strongly believes all service members would benefit greatly by having access to the resources and knowledge that TAP/DTAP provide. TAP/DTAP also needs to update their programs to recognize the large number of National Guard and Reserve business owners who now require training, information and assistance while they attempt to salvage or recover a business which they abandoned to serve their country.

The American Legion strongly recommends DOD require all separating, service members, including those from Reserve Component units, participate in Transition Assistance Program and Disabled Transition Assistance Program training not more than 180 days prior to their separation or retirement from the Armed Forces.

The American Legion recommends \$267 million to DOL-VETS State Administration Grants for FY 2011 (Note: Amount recommended for State Grants include funds for the Transition Assistance Program).

HOMELESSNESS (DOL-VETS)

The American Legion notes there are approximately 107,000 homeless veterans on the street each night. This number, compounded with approximately 200,000 service members entering the civilian sector each year since 2001 with at least a third of them potentially suffering from mental illness, indicates that programs to prevent and assist homeless veterans are needed.

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) is a competitive grant program. Grants are awarded to states or other public entities and non-profit organizations, including faith-based organizations, to operate employment programs that reach out to homeless veterans and help them become gainfully employed. HVRP provides services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment in the labor force and stimulates the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing veterans. HVRP is the only nationwide program focused on assisting homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce.

The American Legion recommends \$50 million for this highly successful grant program in FY 2011.

TRAINING

The National Veterans' Employment and Training Services Institute (NVTI) was established to ensure a high level of proficiency and training for staff that provide veterans employment services. NVTI provides training to federal and state government employment service providers in competency-based training courses.

The American Legion recommends \$6 million for NVTI in FY 2011.

VETERANS WORKFORCE INVESTMENT PROGRAM (VWIP)

VWIP grants support efforts to ensure veterans' lifelong learning and skills development in programs designed to serve most-at-risk veterans, especially those with service-connected disabilities, those with significant barriers to employment, and recently separated veterans. The goal is to provide an effective mix of interventions, including training, retraining, and support services, that lead to long term, higher wage and career jobs.

Veterans need proper training and tools to begin new careers after they leave military service. The Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) has received \$9.6 million in funding, which allows the program to operate in only 15 states. The problem is clearly a lack of adequate funding. Veterans are the only participants in this program. The budget baseline needs to be increased to allow VETS to train eligible veterans in all 50 states in FY 2011.

The American Legion recommends \$20 million for VWIP in FY 2011.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS AND VETERANS' PREFERENCE

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) protects civilian job rights and benefits of veterans and members of the armed forces, including National Guard and Reserve service members. USERRA prohibits employer discrimination due to military obligations and provides reemployment rights to returning service members

Veterans' Preference is authorized by the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944. The Veterans' Employment Opportunity Act (VEOA) of 1998 extended certain rights and remedies to recently separated veterans. VETS have the responsibility to investigate complaints filed by veterans who believe their Veterans' Preference rights have been violated and to conduct an extensive compliance assistance program.

Veterans Preference is being unlawfully ignored by numerous agencies. Whereas figures indicate a decline in claims by veterans of the current conflicts compared to Gulf War I, the reality is that employment opportunities are not being properly publicized. Federal agencies, as well as federal government contractors and subcontractors, are required by law to notify the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) of job opportunities, but more often than not these job opportunities are never made available to the public. The VETS program investigates these claims and corrects unlawful practices.

The American Legion recommends \$61 million for Program Management that encompasses USERRA and VEOA in FY 2011.

In conclusion, thank you for the opportunity to submit The American Legion's recommendations on the funding of DOL-VETS.